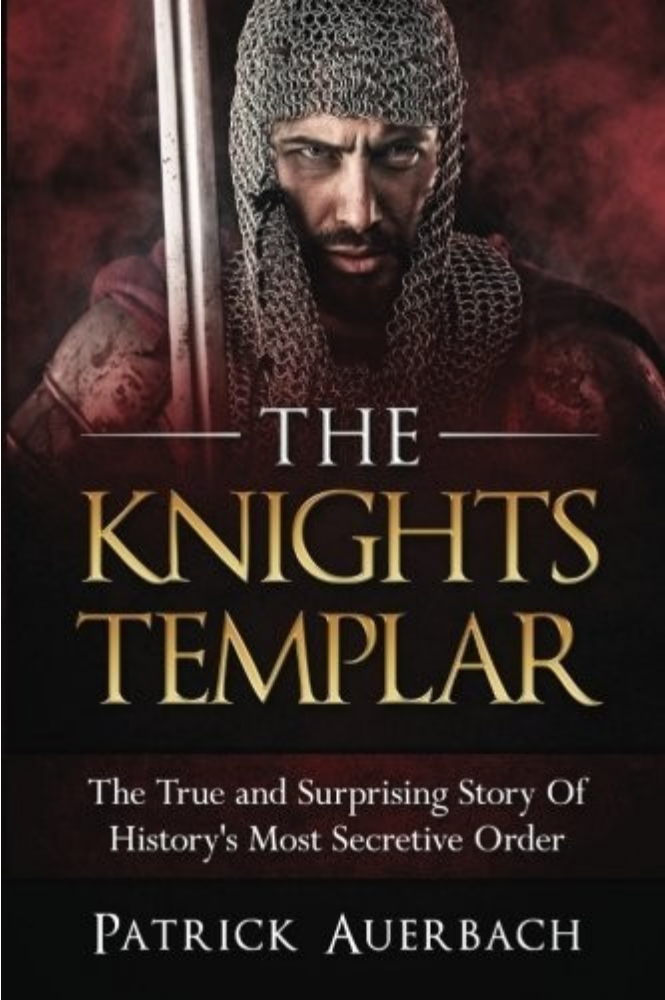


A close-up portrait of a medieval knight wearing chainmail, holding a sword vertically. The knight's face is partially obscured by the chainmail hood, and his expression is serious. The background is dark and smoky.

THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR

The True and Surprising Story Of
History's Most Secretive Order

PATRICK AUERBACH

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— THE — KNIGHTS TEMPLAR

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The Knights Templar:

*The True and Surprising Story of
History's Most Secretive Order*

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Introduction

First of all, I would like to congratulate and thank you for downloading this book! In the chapters that follow, a world of religious empire, warfare, mystery and treasure will be revealed to you. Regarding the Knights Templar, surely you have wondered where fact meets fantasy. The two have become almost indistinguishable as the tale tumbles through the hands of storytellers throughout history. Here, we will take a look at historic accounts and publications as well as lore and speculation to cover what is, if nothing else, a fantastic tale of medieval warfare, glory, greed and power.

The saga of the Knights Templar came to be in the aftermath of the First Crusade. At the height of their power they indebted major nations, held countless properties and assets and became a state to themselves. They had the power to move freely throughout Europe and held privileges that were above the law and even sometimes the church. Their downfall, however, would be exactly the wealth that contributed to their rise of influence. Throughout medieval history, there aren't many stories that are quite as sensational and tragic as that of the Knights Templar.

The holy wars which led to the emergence of the Order were, in many ways, fought for the same reasons that motivated and inspired the Templars. Religion was obviously at the forefront of the agenda. To the knights and in the Christian empire, faith and morality were ruling forces that were revered. Many participants were, in fact, religious martyrs who truly believed they were fighting for Christ himself, or at least that's how it began. Many of the first participants in the Crusades were criminals seeking pardon. These men were petty compared to those of power and their plots to obtain wealth and power under a religious guise.

During this time the common citizen of Europe lived in poverty, and some would even say jealousy. The attractiveness of the East and of Muslim societies that were wealthy and prosperous plagued the minds of westerners, especially church leaders. Combined with this was the issue of communication. History has proven that Muslim countries were surprisingly tolerant of Jews and Christians, allowing them to

pray and travel freely. No one in Europe would have known this, however. Pope Urban II, who called for the First Crusade, motivated by his own agenda – religious or otherwise – capitalized on the crowd. He was reported to have been an exceptional orator, and in his speech to the council he incited Christians against the eastern nations claiming that they were desecrating Christian temples and assaulting Christian pilgrims. All of these allegations were untrue of course, but the public rallied behind the cause. This, along with the general mind-set of the people, could explain why a previously peaceful people were suddenly so quick and ruthless in “liberating” the holy city. Another argument is that the impoverished Christian kings were so eager to exploit eastern riches that they pressured the Pope into calling for a “holy war”. Others claim that Pope Urban II acted alone to serve his own corrupt agenda.

Donald Queller from the University of Illinois has said that “The French knights wanted more land. Italian merchants hoped to expand trade in Middle Eastern ports. . . Large numbers of poor people joined the expeditions simply to escape the hardships of their normal lives.” As the greedy hordes made their way across enemy territories, countless Muslims, Jews and Christians were killed in the name of riches and religion.

Chapter 1: The Rise of the Knights Templar

For two centuries during the Middle Ages, one of the most powerful and wealthy of the Western Christian military orders were the Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ, or more commonly, the Knights Templar. For over 2 centuries, blood ran through the streets in the name of God, borders were drawn around kingdoms and alliances were formed. Out of the bloodshed emerged tales of martyrs, warriors and relics like the spear of destiny and the Holy Grail.

In November of 1095, Pope Urban II summoned 300 members of the clergy to Clermont, France. There, he pleaded with Christians to take up arms against Islam in the Holy Land. His speech was extremely well thought out. He pleaded to his people to stop warring amongst themselves and appealed to all classes. “To let those who have been robbers now become knights”, he called out to the council. Anyone was welcome during the Crusades, whether they were a soldier, knight or commoner. The West had a few specific goals in this; one being to block what was seen as an Islamic incursion and to gain control of Jerusalem, which had previously been ruled by the Arabs and Turks since the seventh century. The Christian kings of the west were all too aware of the imminent threats of other emerging religions and empires around them. Understandably, they were keen on creating a monastic order of defense to keep their kingdom intact and to take the city of Jerusalem under Christian rule. They called themselves a coalition chosen by God himself to fight to the death in righteous and Holy battle.

The Catholic Church offered a powerful motivation to join in Holy battle. Referred to as an indulgence, this was essentially a pardon from any previous crime or debt, and this ensured that the first Crusade would be the most ruthless of them all. Many of the participants were criminals of some sort who wished to start anew once they reached Jerusalem. Rapists, murderers and thieves alike joined the first Crusade and marched east slaughtering Muslims on the promise to have their records wiped clean. For as soon as they took back the Holy Land, all of their crimes would be absolved. Thousands responded to the call to battle and took up their swords. Three years of slaughter and bloodshed followed. The Christians of the west rallied with their allies in the Byzantine to push back the Turks and Arabs

further and further south toward Jerusalem. Once the Crusaders arrived in the Holy Land, a historical battle ensued. Paintings and personal accounts from the event attest that it was indeed a brutal fight of faith.

When Jerusalem was recaptured in 1099, many Christians wished to make the pilgrimage to the Holy Land in order to find themselves in the place of Jesus' birth among other religious reasons. However after the fall of the city, many of the Crusaders had moved on and were no longer protecting the area. Although Jerusalem itself was considered relatively secure at the time, just outside of the city was an exceptionally lawless wilderness. With the influx of religious travelers, a window was opened up for marauders and thieves. On their trying voyage to the Holy Land, hundreds upon hundreds of pilgrims found themselves victims of highwaymen and robbers. These outlaws would prey upon the pilgrims - beating, robbing and in many cases, killing them as they made their way from the coastline of Jaffa to the Holy Land of Jerusalem.

In 1119, Warmund and Baldwin II of Jerusalem were approached by a French knight Hugues de Payens, a wealthy nobleman from the Champagne region of France who served in the first Crusades. De Payens proposed to recruit a handful of relations who vowed to protect the Christian travelers to the Holy Land. The general idea was to have professional soldiers living as monks with a strict moral code and the abilities of noble warriors. The proposition was accepted at the Council of Nablus in early 1120 for political reasons as well as for the safety of pilgrimage.

The Templars were granted headquarters on the Temple Mount in the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The temple was widely believed to have been the ruins of the Temple of Solomon and therefore, that is what it was referred to by the Crusaders. From that location, the Order took the name of "Templar" knights, or the Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon. The original Order included nine men such as Andre de Montbard and Godfrey de Saint-Omer. The knights had very limited resources and relied on charitable contributions to survive. The fact that they were endorsed officially by the Roman Catholic Church in the year 1129 helped to secure the Order as a favored charity throughout the Christian elite. The Templars were innovators with an early form of finance in banking and building which helped to maintain their status and wealth. The bank system began in order to protect not only the lives of Christian travelers, but their money as

well. They created a shadow system of banking with credit cards and checking accounts still observed today. The power of the banks, along with the wealth from interest rates and contributions, all came together in combination to thrust the Templars into the forefront of society. A relatively short time after the bank's creation, much of the European monarchy was in debt to Templar banks.

The order boasted the ownership of a fleet of ships to carry goods, soldiers and pilgrims to the Holy Land of Jerusalem; and as a result "The Order also had to develop sophisticated financial and banking operations. Money raised by its estates had to be transmitted to the 'sharp end' - the Holy Land. As the Templars developed a reputation for the secure transfer of funds, the demand grew for them to do the same on behalf of pilgrims and other travellers. From this developed a system of credit so that a pilgrim could deposit funds at a Templar preceptory in his home country, and then draw goods and services from other Templar houses along his route. So in effect, the Templars invented the principles of the modern chequebook and credit card." The Order consisted of more than just warrior monks following a monastic rule. These men were also bankers and builders who came up with countless secretive networks and codes, and developed an obsession with privacy which then led to the sensational conspiracy theories and speculations of modern times.

Chapter 2: The Banking System of the Order

The Templars are often praised as the fathers of modern banking, and while many were tasked with the protection of pilgrims from the coast to the Holy Land, many others never saw combat. These men filled other roles within the Order and these are roles that attributed to many modern advances in finance and banking. Most of the Templar Knights' duties included keeping records and safeguarding items of value and money left in their care at various monasteries and banks. There were many more Knights charged with overseeing and recording transactions of land transfers, loans and other financial matters than those serving in combat for the Church. "The great majority were administrators of the more than 9,000 manors that had been given to the Order by pious benefactors." As the Order's wealth and assets began to grow, so did their power and influence.

In only a few short years, the Knights Templar became one of the richest entities in the world. With the banks inside the walls of their monasteries and the qualified security to look after their assets, the knights began serving as sort of a safety deposit. Royalty and Nobility had begun to entrust the Knights with the task of securing their valuables in the monasteries. It is not surprising, then, that considering the wealth of the Order they were sought out for loans. They were not the first to do so, but the Templars were responsible for issuing loans that were much better documented than any other accounts during the middle-ages. The language used in these legal documents and transactions were not unlike that which is used today in the same sort of agreements.

The banking services were not free, but the majority of pilgrims found that the cost of banking with the Templars was better than the risk of traveling with their life savings. However their innovation brought about a fair amount of fraud. The warrior monks knew a thing or two about secrecy. "The other consequence of the banking operations came from a demand for secure communications. As can be seen from today's credit card crimes, a move away from hard cash is open to fraud and forgery - how, for example, could one Templar house be sure that a document presented to them really did come from another Templar house on the other side of Europe? The knights therefore developed a system of codes, both for identification and for the safe

passing of information.” They put forth a successful banking system which required withdrawal and deposit information, which was then made secure by ciphers. These effects led to an even more sophisticated information network, namely military intelligence.

In researching the written accounts completed by the Order, it is clear to see the enormity of loan transactions and the level of wealth that was present. The knights involved themselves in some of the largest loans of the time, including those to royal houses. With their secure and trustworthy reputation solidified, royalty and commoners alike had begun doing business with the Templars. The Order was well known for their code of conduct during battle, but they also clearly showed their influence on a much larger financial and business-minded scale.

Chapter 3: A Knight's Code of Honor

The Templar Code originally had 72 tenets, but emphasis was put mainly on poverty and chastity and the virtue of renouncing earthly desires and personal wealth. They are also considered to be one of the first true cooperatives. The brothers pledged their assets to the collective for day-to-day operations. These rules helped to create one of the most powerful and wealthy organizations in the span of a few decades. Over time, the number of rules soared to over 700. These were created to manage the daily events of a knight's life and reportedly, a Templar Knight was required to ask permission before spitting. When he did, he would then receive exact instructions on how to proceed. At the height of their power in the 13th century, they boasted 160,000 members and 20,000 armed knights scattered around the 9,000 holdings across Europe, the Mediterranean and the Holy Land.

The Templar code was styled to resemble that of the Cistercian Monks as was written by Abbot Bernard de Clairvaux. The Order had requested to use a similar outline during the Council of Troyes and received formal recognition by the Catholic Church and the Pope in 1128. The Chivalric Code of the Knights of previous years had primarily been used for mobilizing troops in both offensive and defensive military endeavors and also as a way to pay respect to the social infrastructure of the nobility system.

In reference to knightly duties, the code suggested that there was a commitment to be observed in doing what was best for the community, family and country as long as that did not breach other principles of conduct and honor. The knights were fiercely obedient as described in their oath that a vow or promise was sacred and was to be honored unless the recipient had broken his contract of their own willful actions. In reference to obedience, the Templars recognized God as the ultimate judge of obedience. In no way was it justified to break a vow in the eyes of God. Knights were required to hold fast to their commitments and were only relieved of such if the opposite party willingly broke the bond.

The virtue of honor was considered a manner of conduct based on purity and integrity. The knights refused to compromise their virtues and at the core of honor was truth, regardless of what the

repercussions might have been. Honor was the statement that you would defend what you stood for not just in statements, but in actions and the way you treated others and carried yourself. This leads to the next point- conduct. The Order placed great emphasis on living your life by a certain moral conduct. That is, doing what was perceived to be righteous at the time with the knowledge at hand.

The pursuit of knowledge and wisdom was another pillar of the code. In fact, it is one of the most notable driving factors of the era. The irony of this is that the search will never be complete. The actual attainment of knowledge is fleeting. It is constantly turned over as new wisdom comes into being and thus one cannot reach the pinnacle until one crosses over into the infinite enlightenment as was promised by God. The Templars also placed emphasis on being humble in their works as they were a direct reflection of devotion to the Order. Anything done in the name of the Knights Templar was expected to be carried out in a way that was representative of the noble brotherhood. Humility was taught in that when great results were achieved, one did not boast or seek praise from outside sources but rather rejoice quietly in having given one's best effort. If in the end the task was not able to be completed, it was not acceptable to place blame on anyone else for your failures. One must be honest and factual when discussing the cause of the outcome and take responsibility for such, and then reflect on how to avoid the same result in the future or remedy the outcome if possible.

As a Christian order, the knights were required to adhere to the principles of Christ in any and all endeavors. As well as living by Christ under the Templar code, the knights were keen on family life. They considered the institution of family as a step forward in the evolution from self and one of life's greatest responsibilities. They valued living to provide for the safety, health and quality of life for their families. They believed that if one failed their children, then essentially they had failed themselves. The general idea was that children and their noble raising was of the utmost importance to the knights because they should take their moral code into fatherhood to mold and instill the Templar's values.

When it came to the ideal of character and the facing down of adversity, the knights called character the metaphorical vessel which holds our values. The Order claimed that character was the way one's innermost soul sparked one's actions and whether it came from a good and noble place. They considered that the way one treated another

person was directly correlated to the convictions of their heart. They vehemently believed that nothing was impossible through Christ. Any sort of adversity that stood in their path could be overcome with strength of faith. Their resolve came from the mind-set that God would have not allowed the obstacle in their lives unless He believed they could overcome it. Therefore, putting faith in Him gave them strength in purpose and enabled the knights to overcome any and all adversities. The knights also had the same view regarding loved ones as well. If one was harmed by a loved one's actions, one was not to lash out or seek revenge but to seek justice. If for some reason justice could not be employed, they must believe that it had happened because something better would come from the situation. This again went back to the theme of divine intervention. The knights must have believed that no matter what the circumstance, good or bad, that living a life of God meant that they should trust in him. Strength of character and faith in God, it was said, would carry the knights on any journey they embarked on. They believed that the Christian faith was the righteous one and that God was on their side. But then again, that's what their Islamic neighbors believed as well.

Templar knights usually convened at their church under the cover of night. The potential candidate was ordered to remain outside the doors where he would then be asked three times by a messenger of the Grand Master whether he truly wished to become a Templar. After he delivered his answer, he was brought in formally. The Grand Master would then ask something like: "The rules of our order are strict, and you are beginning a life of endurance and not one of ease; one of danger and one of self-denial. You will have to watch when perhaps you will be sighing for sleep; to endure fatigue when you would fain rest; to be hungry and thirsty when you are longing to eat and to drink; and to leave one country for another without a moment's hesitation, if your vow requires it. Do you really wish to be a Templar? Are you in good health? Are you betrothed or married? Are you in debt, and cannot pay? Do you belong to any other order?"

If the aspirant gave satisfactory answers to all of the Grand Master's questions, he was administered the vow of the order. The vow consisted of three major points which were that of poverty, obedience and chastity. They would have sounded something like, "I swear to defend with my life, my strength and my speech, the holy doctrines of the Trinity and the Catholic faith. I promise to be obedient and submissive to the Grand Master; and to travel by sea or land if need be, to defend my brother Christians against the Infidels. My right hand

and sword shall be dedicated to the service of the king and church against the Moslems; and I swear never to shun a combat with any miscreants if only three in number. I will fight them in single combat, and never fly from an enemy.” The knights seemingly had a special obsession with numerology and the number three shows up many times during the initiation process. They joined together with other chapters three times per year, observed mass and ate meat three times a week, and if at any time they failed during the course of duty, they were flogged in front of the entire chapter three times. However if a Templar failed in his duty of fighting the Infidels, he would be banished from the Order for life.

Generally, the Templar code is not unlike anything we live by today. Most people consider things like honor, family and truth to be paramount and try to embody these values on a daily basis. In my research for this book, I came across countless modern “orders” complete with a dot com address and promoting these knightly ideals. The practice of this moral code gives people purpose and a sense of pride in their family, community and their faith. Even in the modern age, long after the time of the Knights Templar, some people are even vowing to live a life of righteousness and morality as outlined by the Templar code.

Chapter 4: Symbolism During the Crusades and Middle Ages

The Knights Templar used a multitude of various symbols and insignia to distinguish themselves and their property. The first of these is the Beauseant banner, which features a black and white flag that can be symbolic of the battle against good and evil. The banner was one of the most widely-used symbols for individual Templars. Knights were expected to always be aware of the banner's location while on the battlefield according to the statutes of the Order. If ever the men became scattered or overwhelmed by the enemy, they were required to take up formation under the Beauseant.

The symbol of the cross had been used as a symbol of Christianity long before the middle-ages. There was nothing more suitable for the armies of Crusaders than to use the cross as a visual distinction. Abbot Guibert's History of Jerusalem claims that Pope Urban II called to use the sign as both an indicator of military status and a motivational symbol for Christian knights to fight with valor for a Godly cause. The abbot attested that the Pope ordered the Crusaders to cut out crosses from any sort of material and sew them onto their cloaks and tunics. Fulcher of Chartres penned the following: "O, how fitting and how pleasing it was for us all to see those crosses, stitched in silk or in gold, or made out of any kind of material, which the Pilgrims, following the order of the Pope, fashioned on their shoulders after pledging to set out on this march". Evidently in the beginning, there was no specific design or color that was required of the Crusaders. The original nine members of Knights Templar Order were said to have worn crosses on their tunics in Palestine during the first Crusade, but history has been unclear about the way they looked originally. Pope Honorius II allowed the Knights the privilege to use distinctive white cloaks without crosses in the year 1128. The idea of a simple and modest white robe was symbolic of innocence. It wasn't until 1145-1153 that Eugene III mandated that the Order wear the red cross of martyrdom.

The image of the lion is found quite often when researching the Knights. The animal is an ancient symbol of power and regality and appeared on quite a few occasions in medieval history. In that sense, it is not surprising that lions were used in Templar seals and architecture. The tower of the Order's bastion was crowned with four

gilded lions, costing 1,500 bezants, as told by the historian known as the “Templar of Tyre”. These would have certainly been a conveyance of the Order’s incredible wealth and might. The knights more than likely chose this symbol for multiple reasons, one of course being the connotations of military valor and strength. Bernard of Clairvaux’s “In Praise of the New Knighthood” likened the Knights Templar to the vehement beast as well as the meek lamb which the Knights also used in its seal.

Throughout the years the Templar seal was changed multiple times, but most commonly during the end of the 12th century the Templar Grand Masters employed the use of a two-sided seal which depicted The Dome of the Rock – an architectural addition to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. On the other side appeared the Order’s commonly used symbol of two knights riding on a single horse. This specific design was first used by Bertrand de Blanquefort, the sixth Grand Master of the Order, in 1158 and remained the standard until the dissolution of the Templars in 1312. In addition to the double-sided seal, there was also a single-sided one featuring only the Dome of the Rock – or Dome of the Holy Sepulchre. According to Innocent IV, around the year 1251 it was common for provincial masters who experienced a fair amount of success to use the same seal. The provincial master continued the use of the Agnus Dei, or Lamb of God seal. William of Cardona, the Aragonese master, used a seal which depicted a knight on horseback who carried a shield and lance with a cross and the wording “S. MINISTRI TEMPI 1 ARAGON 7 CATALON”. This was translated to “Seal of the Minister of the Temple Aragon and Catalonia.”

Thirty meters below the city of Jerusalem lies a vast and intricate network of cave systems that were made by cutting through the limestone. The catacombs were given added strength by stone columns which were 70 feet high. These caverns were said to have been carved out by the Knights Templar over 900 years ago in their search for religious relics after they took residence in the Haram al-Sharif at Temple Mount. When the tunnels were excavated by Cities of the Underworld, they discovered a fleur-de-lis carved into one of the grand columns and caught it in the documentary footage as the crew conducted their exploration.

Chapter 5: The Second Crusade

In the span of two short years between 1147 and 1149, The Second Crusade was considered to have provided a sort of measurement of the success that the Templars established. On the night before Christmas 1144, an army commanded by the governor of Aleppo and Mosul Imad ad-Din Zengi overthrew the city of Edessa. Nearly a year later, the news of Edessa's fall finally reached Pope Eugenius III. In a letter, he urged King Louis VII of France to lead a second Crusade against Islam and take back the city. The problem was that Louis was not in exceptional favor with his barons. Three years prior he had intentionally started a war in order to illegally seize a large portion of land from Theobald of Champagne. Much to his surprise, not many showed interest in his proposal to launch an eastern expedition. Louis turned to Bernard of Clairvaux in the hope that he would be able to rally the public in a meeting scheduled for Easter of 1146 in Burgundy.

Reminiscent of Pope Urban's address to the clergy in 1095, the scene in Burgundy on March 31st 1146 drew immense crowds. People flooded into the city, so many that Bernard delivered his speech from a platform which had been built specifically for this event. The hordes had come for the prospect of listening to Bernard preaching the sermon of the Crusade. Many of the attendees were themselves children and grandchildren of the first Crusaders, just as keen on carrying on the honor of the family as they were on liberating the city of Edessa. His speech had fallen on eager ears. He wrote a summation to King Louis claiming: "Villages and towns are now deserted... Everywhere you will see widows whose husbands are still alive."

The next spring, both Pope Eugenius and King Louis attended a Chapter meeting at the Paris Temple. Four archbishops, 130 Templar knights and just as many squires and sergeants gathered together. As well as discussing departure and strategy, Pope Eugenius appointed a treasurer to receive the tax he had levied in order to support the new Crusade. William of Tyre suggested that during this meeting Eugenius should give to the Templars the honor of adding a red cross to their white mantles as a symbol of martyrdom and their willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice for their faith and their righteous cause. Germany was brimming with zeal for the crusades during this time, and King Conrad III of Germany was on board as well after hearing Bernard's speech in the Rhineland. Conrad was intent on leading

German soldiers to fight alongside the French. Accompanied by Master Everard des Barres from the Temple of France and those knights who were present at the Chapter meeting in spring, the French and German armies took the same route as the First Crusade. Everard played a crucial role in negotiations with the Byzantine Emperor Manuel Comnenus. King Louis looked upon Manuel with skepticism, as he had joined in peace with the Seljuk Turks forming an alliance against Roger of Sicily. Tensions were high, as Manuel didn't think highly of the prospect of western forces bearing down upon his empire and the French were wary to trust an emperor who would sign a peace treaty with the Turks. Despite these factors, Everard succeeded in securing safe passage for the Crusaders.

This was seemingly the first and last victory of the Second Crusade. In January of 1148 the French, browbeaten and demoralized by the unrelenting winter, learned that Conrad's army had been defeated by the Seljuk Turks at Dorylaeum. While trudging through the narrow passages of the Cadmus Mountains the French found themselves under attack as well. Their heavy weaponry was immobilized and rendered useless in the rocky terrain, and the masterful archers of the Turkish light infantry rained arrows down upon them. The French who were lucky enough to escape death suffered from blows to their morale and severe shortages of provisions.

Once again, Louis called on the Knights Templar and Everard des Barres who divided the army into smaller units of 50 men and appointed a Templar as commander of each. This action alone breathed fresh air into the French and boosted morale enough for the disparaged troops to make it to the port of Attila, where Louis took the most skilled and able-bodied warriors to Antioch. Once they reached the shore of Antioch the Crusaders once again suffered another blow, and once again Louis turned to Everard de Barres for help. In getting his army through Asia Minor, Louis had used up almost all of the allotted tax funds. In an effort to find sufficient funding for the Second Crusade, de Barres sailed to Acre where he succeeded in securing enough capital to continue their journey. This act served as proof that the Templars had indeed become an unrivaled financial institution. Everard was able to either draw from the Templar treasury directly or borrow the funds using the Order's many assets as collateral. Whichever was the case, it solidified the bond between the French monarchy and the Templars resulting in the Templars acting as the French Royal Treasury until the 13th century.

In the remaining years of the Second Crusade, the Order seemed to have backed away from their formerly prominent role. They had secured funding but saw that the excursion was taking a turn for the worse when they silently bowed out. In June, a council was drawn together in Acre to decide on a new course of action. Both the Grand Master of the Hospital, Raymond du Puy and the Templar Grand Master, Robert de Craon, were present. The group argued back and forth in a debate as to whether they should march through Aleppo toward Edessa or if they should instead take on Ascalon to the south. After a long and drawn out process, it was finally decided that the next target would be Damascus.

The Crusaders had been planning to attack the city in the following month. The Crusaders did have a fair amount of success in the western side of the city; however the men made the unfortunate mistake of moving around the eastern border. Their new position in the east was not as well supplied as their previous camp had been. They were without water and for some reason had agreed upon launching their next attack at the most fortified portion of the wall that bordered Damascus. Upon hearing the rumors that a massive Muslim force had been forming under Nur ed-Din, son of Zengi, the Christian army made the excruciating decision to pack up and retreat. The Second Crusade had come to an anticlimactic end and blame began to circulate for its failure.

Many different theories were revealed to explain the fiasco that was the Second Crusade. Some were sceptical about the Knights Templar's early exit and the Order was accused of treachery. The Templars, on the other hand, had looked down upon the Christians of Outremer, or "Men of Jerusalem", for assimilating to eastern ways. There was plenty of blame to go around. John of Wurzburg was a German monk who sided with the Christians in Outremer, believing that the Templars were to blame for the fall of Christians at Damascus. He and an anonymous colleague claimed that they had been bribed by the Damascenes to bow out of the battle and spare the city. They both turned out to be justified in their accusations. There were rumors that the "Men of Jerusalem" had accepted money in exchange for their mercy. The early 13th century account of Ernoul and Bernard the Treasurer claimed that the Hospitallers were working with the Templars and profiting from these Holy Wars. The Order had in fact been paid off by Damascus, and with counterfeited money at that. However many of these accusatory claims were made decades after the end of the Second Crusades and most scholars believe that the

chroniclers were merely reflecting disdain for the Temple and the Hospital that went back to 1148.

Chapter 6: The Battle of Montgisard

Stephen Howarth described the ensuing battle like this: “There were twenty-six thousand Saracen horsemen, only a few hundred Christians; but the Saracen were routed. Most were killed; Saladin himself only escaped because he rode a racing camel. The young king with his hands bandaged, rode in the forefront of the Christian charge – with St. George beside him, people said, and the True Cross shining as brightly as the sun. Whether or not that was so, it was an almost incredible victory, an echo of the days of the First Crusade. But it was also the last time such a great Muslim army was beaten by such a small force.”

In the year 1177, the Christian empire was in the midst of a crisis. King Baldwin IV of Jerusalem, who suffered from leprosy, was unable to produce an heir due to his affliction. He was crowned in July of 1174 at only 13 years of age after the death of King Amalric. The “Leper King” became somewhat of a figurehead for the Crusade despite his illness as he was admired for his displays of loyalty, courage and wisdom. Sensing the vulnerability of his kingdom and dealing with his own mortality, Baldwin sent for western aid. In the summer of 1177 the Count of Flanders, Philip of Alsace, arrived in Acre accompanied by a rather large group of Western knights.

Philip offered to assist Baldwin in alliance to complete the invasion of Egypt with the help of a Byzantine naval fleet, the task left behind by the previous King of Jerusalem- Amalric. Plans were halted, however, when Philip began making demands that neither the King of Jerusalem nor the Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire were comfortable meeting. Philip had requested to be made king of any regions that were conquered by the Christian armies. At this, the expedition was entirely abandoned. The Byzantine navy withdrew their support and Philip left to travel north with his knights in an attack on the Seljuk posts at Harim and Hama.

Saladin, who founded the Ayyubid dynasty and was the sultan of Syria and Egypt during the last few decades of the 12th century, had gotten word that the Christian offense against Egypt had been called off. Not only that, but he heard that the Byzantine fleet had receded and Philip’s knights had moved off to the north. The timing could not have been more in Saladin’s favor. He had already assembled his armies in

Egypt in wait of Christian attack, so he decided to seize the opportunity. Saladin's 26,000 light cavalry and 1,000 personal guards left Egypt en route to Jerusalem.

In an anonymously written Christian chronicle, once the dismal news of the mobilization of Saladin's forces reached Jerusalem the public fell into despair. Their king was only 16 years old with no experience in battle and they no longer had the protection of Philip's knights or the Byzantine fleet. Baldwin assembled his troops; a mere 376 knights. A few notable figures that joined Baldwin IV in battle were Master of the Templar Knights Odo of St. Amand accompanied by the 80 men of his order, Joscelin of Edessa, Raynald of Chatillon, Raynald Sidon and Baldwin of Ibelin alongside his brother, Balian. They carried with them the Cross of Christ, sometimes referred to as the True Cross.

Saladin and his massive army crossed over into the Christian empire on November 8th, 1177. He was confident in knowing that his great army severely outnumbered the enemy, but that quite likely could have been his downfall. Saladin's troops were making their way up the Palestinian coast when Baldwin got word of his whereabouts. In a defensive maneuver, Odo de St Amand laid out an order for every knight under his control to mobilize and go south toward Gaza. Saladin was thinking two steps ahead, however, and sailed past Gaza to lay siege on Ascalon, a city captured from them twenty years prior. Baldwin had succeeded in rallying around 500 knights whom he then sent forth to the port city to head off Saladin's men. Saladin changed tactics once again, choosing to avoid both cities altogether. Realizing that Gaza would be patrolled by Templars and that Baldwin's men had just arrived in Ascalon, the sultan left behind a small battalion in order to occupy Baldwin and proceeded to move north straight through unguarded territory towards Jerusalem.

Perhaps the turning point in the Battle of Montgisard was when Saladin's overconfidence persuaded him to split his army in order to overtake multiple cities at once on the path to Jerusalem. His men fanned out attacking and pillaging the cities of Lydda, Arsuf and Ramla as the population took refuge at the Citadel of David. Meanwhile, the Templars and King Baldwin IV came back together with a combined force of 80 Templars and a couple of thousand infantries. After issuing an *arrière ban* - a sort of draft or call to arms to every Christian in defense of the region - infantry began to join him from every city. On November 25th, King Baldwin's combined army of 450 knights - including 84 Templars from Gaza - headed off Saladin in

Montgisard near the city of Ramla, which caught him completely by surprise. He could not mobilize his troops fast enough to guard against the approaching coalition. The Christians descended upon Saladin's men without warning, even slaughtering a portion of his cavalry while they watered their horses in a nearby stream.

An eyewitness account of the Battle of Montgisard chronicled by Ralph of Dis tells of a devastating charge by Baldwin and the Templars: "Spurring all together, as one man, they [the Templars] made a charge, turning neither to the left nor to the right. Recognizing the battalion in which Saladin commanded many knights, they manfully approached it, immediately penetrated it, incessantly knocked down, scattered, struck and crushed. Saladin was smitten with admiration, seeing his men dispersed everywhere, everywhere turned in flight, everywhere given to the mouth of the sword."

Saladin's army was not at all prepared for this type of warfare, so he hastily recalled his cavalry and rearranged them into the center flanked by two wings, one of which was commanded by Taqi ad-Din, his nephew. The horses were beyond exhausted, as the cavalry had not slowed their advance since their departure from Egypt. While Saladin was busy with maneuvering his flanks, the Christians launched their attack on the center line of defense. Taqi ad-Din's son was killed in battle and Diya ad-Din, the jurist, was taken as prisoner of the Christian army. The Muslims suffered debilitating losses and Saladin himself barely escaped on camelback. Baldwin went after Saladin and pursued him until the sun set, then returned to Ascalon.

After suffering from the loss of almost all of his army, including his Mamluks or bodyguards, Saladin fled home to Egypt leaving his men to fend for themselves in the deserts that bordered Ramla. Although the Muslims fought with conviction and there were a number of Christian casualties, Saladin's men were soon forced to accept defeat. Those who were not slain immediately on the battlefield ended up scattered defenseless across the desert of enemy territory. Heavy rains set in and they were forced to abandon any plunder that they had accumulated. Left with little or no resources, freezing, soaked and dispersed, the members of Saladin's cavalry were easy to overcome. Those who were caught in Christian villages were killed, handed over as captives or sold into slavery. After the events in Lydda and Ramla, residents had every reason to crave justice and they took their revenge. Approximately only a tenth of the sultan's men returned safely to Egypt after the Battle of Montgisard.

In the end, the courage of the Leper King and the skill of Odo de St Armand's Templars contributed to defeating the sultan's advances on Jerusalem. The humiliation and crushing defeat of Saladin would only serve as motivation and a learning experience for the upcoming battle. A decade later in July 1187, the sultan would have his revenge and take back the Holy City of Jerusalem in the Battle of Hattin. The success of King Baldwin IV was triumphant, yet short lived. He knew very well that Saladin's combined forces were far more numerous than could be overthrown by the Christian empire. They were able to absorb a defeat of such a magnitude without losing the majority of Muslim fighters, and the sultan had public approval on his side as well. This was just the beginning of the shift in power during the Crusades. Baldwin IV was succeeded after his death in the spring of 1185 by his nephew, the young King Baldwin V, before Baldwin IV's sister and brother-in-law Sibylla and Guy of Lusignan led their armies into the Battle of Hattin. During this turbulent time, the Christian empire was experiencing its final stand.

Chapter 7: The Battle of Hattin

Following King Baldwin's death in 1186, he was replaced (due to the Templar Knights' support) by his brother-in-law, Guy of Lusignan. The instatement of the new king was vehemently opposed by the Hospitallers, and in response, the Hospitaller Master ordered his men to leave the scene of Guy's ceremony. The reason for the lack of support from the Hospitallers was that in 1184, after they had paid a tribute to the Christians for the privilege of using their land for their grazing sheep, King Guy of Jerusalem ordered an attack on the small group of Bedouin shepherds. Guy's soldiers massacred nearly all of the tribe and drove the survivors and their flock out of the region.

Another unsavory friend of the Templars was Reynald de Chatillon, the Prince of Antioch. After being involved with King Louis in the Second Crusade, Reynald stayed behind and struck up a crooked relationship with the Templars; the terms and motivation for this is unknown. However, it can be assumed from Reynald's reprehensible actions that the friendship was not for righteous reasons. After multiple attempts to blackmail the Emperor of Constantinople, Reynald was met with disapproval from the Patriarch of Constantinople. In a despicable attempt at retribution, he ordered his men to capture and imprison the Patriarch. Reynald then placed a number of cuts into the scalp of the Patriarch and covered his wounds in honey before chaining him to the rooftop where the combination of the insects and the summer sun drove the man of the cloth to the brink of insanity. In the summer of 1187, however, the cruelty exhibited by these two men would come back upon them tenfold.

On July 4th 1187, one of the deadliest battles in the history of the Crusades ensued - The Battle of the Horns of Hattin. The area was so named for the pair of mountains that rose up behind Tiberius on the Sea of Galilee. In this place, Saladin had summoned 12,000 of his warrior knights as well as an additional force who were given the task of carrying provisions. On the opposing corner of the battlefield assembled the 20,000 foot soldiers and 1,000 knights of the crusading forces who had been removed from their guard of surrounding cities, leaving these unarmed and vulnerable to attack. In the light of dawn on July 3rd, the Crusaders headed out toward Tiberius carrying another coveted Holy relic with them, the True Cross, which was discovered by the mother of Constantine the Great in 326 CE.

The Crusaders had mistakenly under-estimated the amount of water that their army would require and soon found themselves bone dry with no source of hydration in sight. Being near dehydration and trekking in heavy armor under the desert sun, the army were hopelessly exhausted. By the night of July 3rd, they had stopped to rest at a plateau in the shadow of the Horns of Hattin, jutting out 100 feet over their temporary camp. To their horror, they found that the well on site had run dry and the route to the only stream in the area was blocked. Fear and foreboding doom ran through the camp. The Count of Tripoli was said to have come down off his horse, dropped to his knees, and cried woe to the heavens: "Lord God, our war is over! We are nothing but dead men-and the Kingdom has come to an end." While others slept, some of the men foolishly came down from the safety of the plateau in order to quench their thirst only to be beheaded by Saladin's men who were lying in wait near the water source. The Muslim army then set out to torment and instill fear in the Crusaders by setting ablaze the dry grass which covered the side of the hill.

As dawn approached, the Crusaders found themselves completely enclosed by Saladin's forces. The Muslim army were so secure in their tactics that chroniclers of the event claim that "not a cat could have slipped through the net." The Crusaders were exhausted and vastly outnumbered when they heard the sound of horns heralding the impending attack. The Crusaders fought recklessly, charging into battle. Saladin's army had prepared for this tactic and instead of meeting their advances, opened up and allowed the Christians to charge through their line. Once through, Saladin and his forces closed the gap leaving the Crusaders surrounded on all sides. Saladin's men charged up the hill in endless waves. The Christian army fought fiercely, but being surrounded and outnumbered many met their fate at the sharp end of Saracen blades. As the sun continued to rise in the sky, the number of Christian knights began to dwindle. The few hundred warriors of the cross who were left ended up being pushed backwards towards Guy's tent, where inside he stood trembling and clutching the True Cross. Sensing the approaching victory, Saladin's son exclaimed that the infidels had been defeated. His father chastised him and claimed that the battle was not won until the tent was brought down. One final charge of the Muslims saw the tent crumble into the desert.

The remaining soldiers were then gathered and taken back to a tent at Saladin's base camp specifically built for housing prisoners.

Customarily, they sold into slavery the common foot soldiers and beheaded the rest. One Saracen had such a large number of slaves that he reportedly traded one for footwear. Saladin and his army spared no one save the Grand Master, Gerard de Ridefort. The Christians who were not sold as slaves were ceremoniously forced to their knees and beheaded. All accepted their death with honor and dignity, as was the code of the Order. In actuality, many soldiers welcomed their death in lieu of living a life of dishonor and cowardice as a slave.

Saladin did, however opt to spare the Barons, choosing to hold them as prisoners for a large ransom. Our old friend King Guy of Jerusalem lay parched and fearful on the ground in the tent as Saladin handed down a drink of water. Guy hastily drank the water and in turn, offered it to Reynald. Observing Reynald's skepticism, Saladin rose up and knocked the cup from the Prince's hands. For according to codes of hospitality, to deny a gesture of food or drink was ungrateful and insubordinate. This sealed the fate of both men. Guy was spared. Reynald was sentenced to death. When Reynald spoke out in anger against Muhammed, the prophet of Islam, Saladin unsheathed his sword and took Reynald's arm in one fluid motion. In the next moment, reportedly before the Christian's severed limb fell to the floor, one of Saladin's soldiers had decapitated Reynald. Saladin turned on his heel to face King Guy of Jerusalem and told him to "Have no fear. It is not the custom of kings to kill kings." A year after the Battle of Hattin, King Guy emerged from a prison in the city of Nablus. In the following months Saladin continued his path south of Tyre through the cities of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem itself. When the Pope received news of Jerusalem's capture, He called for the Third Crusade.

Chapter 8: The Third Crusade

In 1188, after getting word that the Holy City had fallen to Saladin, the French King Philip Augustus and King Henry II vowed to take the Cross and liberate Jerusalem. In an effort to raise capital for the expedition, the two established the Saladin Tithe. Widely considered as one of the first examples of a nationwide income tax, it demanded 10% of all the value of revenues and properties of those people who were not on crusade. The edict declared: “This year each man shall give in alms a tenth of his revenues and movables with the exception of the arms, horses and garments of the knights, and likewise with the exception of the horses, books, garments and vestments, and all appurtenances of whatever sort used by clerks in divine service, and the precious stones belonging to both clerks and laymen.”

There was such great rebellion against the Tithe in France that King Philip had no choice but to suspend the tax, and later even apologized for having imposed it. England, however, boasted greater royal power and the Tithe was collected with ruthless efficiency, raising around £80,000 for the Third Crusade. The funds were not collected by sheriffs and sent to the Exchequer, but instead were taken up by local church officials, barons and sergeants then turned into an office in Salisbury. The Knights Hospitaller as well as the Knights Templar were responsible for organizing the local collections. As a measure to encourage participation, any man may be exempt if he were to join the Crusade. Many landowners did join the efforts to avoid taxation; however all other citizens – laymen and clerics alike – were forced to contribute or face excommunication or imprisonment. The outlines of the Saladin Tithe were used as a model and referenced in 1194 to ransom Richard and again in 1207 to fund John’s Continental wars.

The efforts to recapture Jerusalem began when King Richard the Lionheart of England, Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa of Germany and King Philip Augustus answered the call to join in battle. However, while crossing a river in Cilicia, an aging Frederick was drowned. The Third Crusade was already wrought with misfortune. In the summer of 1191, the Crusaders reached the Holy Land and liberated the city of Acre from the Turks. After the city was back in Christian favor, Philip returned home to France. Despite the fact that efforts to reclaim Jerusalem were a failure, Richard continued on with the campaign, securing a three-year treaty with Saladin. The terms left the eastern coast under Christian control, and the city of Jerusalem was to be

ruled by Saladin. In compromise however, Saladin agreed to allow Christian pilgrims into the city of Jerusalem.

Chapter 9: Friday the Thirteenth

In the Gregorian calendar, a month beginning with Sunday will have the 13th fall on a Friday; and the 13th falls on a Friday more often than on any other day in the week. The clinical term for the fear of Friday the 13th, Paraskevidekatriaphobia, seems to be the cause of skipping work, refusing to travel and a general uneasiness. This may explain the absence of the 13th floor in some buildings, or of room 13 in hotels. What is the cause of this superstition? Is it mere coincidence? Actually, the aversion to the number 13 and its negative connotations only occurs among Western civilization and Christian-based cultures. Is it simply confirmation bias – when perceived bad things happen on a day or in a situation that you already believe is bad – or is there something more?

Several theories have been proposed as to how the superstition started, but for each proposal there is a person ready to debunk the idea. In Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, a number of Templar knights were arrested on Friday the 13th. The book aided in popularizing a belief that superstition of the date resulted from those arrests. From a literary standpoint, the date wasn't aligned with superstition or bad luck until the novel 'Friday, the Thirteenth' was published in 1907. Author Nathaniel Lachenmeyer proposed that the number 13 had been considered unlucky since before the 20th century. Friday was thought to be unlucky as was the number 13, but the idea of "Friday the 13th" didn't necessarily exist. Just like the misunderstanding of the Order, these rumors and superstitions have weaved themselves into the records of history regardless of their origins.

The Knights Templar had become a truly formidable force. Their rise to stature and power proved unsettling for much of the ruling class of Europe. Their influence grew exponentially as many royal families ended up in debt to the Order. One monarch in particular, King Philip IV of France, had been loaned rather large sums by the Templar banks to pay for a longstanding war with England in which he was painfully defeated. The king harbored a deep sense of disdain for Templar knights. After they indebted and humiliated him, Philip attempted to gain favor with Pope Clement in an audacious plan to overthrow the Order. The knights had already been granted favor by the Pope and were the only group that could move freely across borders. They were an empire unto themselves.

King Philip was indeed out to defame and destroy the Templars before absorbing their vast wealth by accusing them of such heinous crimes that even if they were somehow found innocent, the simple allegation would ruin their name among Christian nations. He had heard whisperings of a merger between the Hospitallers and the Templars. The two groups were in meetings about a possible joint effort and the King, in order to squelch any impending power shifts, approached Pope Clement with incredible reports of the Order. The king spouted wild accusations such as sodomy, orgies, homosexuality, incest, the worship of false idols, involvement with dark magic and the occult, spitting on the crucifix and denying Christ – essentially slander against the Templars. This is another example of how history and fantasy intertwine to form the sensational and mysterious legend of which we know today. Regarding the many accounts of the Order is difficult to discern where history ends and storytelling begins.

The Grand Master of the Knights Templar, Jacques de Molay, was in Poitiers, France to meet with the pope in discussions of a new Crusade to recapture Jerusalem. For several months Molay had been working on securing financing for the Crusade, unaware of the dubious plot against he and his men. He had been in Paris at the funeral of Catherine of Valois serving as a pallbearer. Unbeknownst to him, Catherine's brother-in-law Philip le Bel – referred to as the "scourge of France" by Dante – was the author of charges brought against him. The following day, the wave of Templar arrests swept Europe and the shocking charges levied.

Realizing the error of his actions, Pope Clement wrote a letter to King Philip in defense of the Knights Templar stating "You have perpetrated these attacks on the persons and goods of people directly subject to the Roman Church. In this action of yours... everybody sees... an insulting contempt for us and the Church of Rome."

The beginning of the end is reported to have occurred on Friday, October 13th 1307, when a number of arrests were made on the Templars including their Grand Master de Molay. Imprisoned and cast into the depths of the dungeons, the men were subjected to isolation and physical and psychological torture on alarming levels. They were subjected to racking, starvation and water torture. The soles of their feet were covered in fat and blistered over hot coals. The strappado was a common technique involving pulling a bound victim off of the ground and dropping him suddenly, dislocating his shoulders and breaking his arms. They were humiliated, denied sleep and forced to

defecate where they stood. Not surprisingly, an overwhelming majority confessed to any and all crimes against them in hopes that the Pope would throw out any unjust convictions. No one came to their aid however, and after a coerced confession was obtained 54 knights were burned at the stake for the “crime” of recanting their confessions. All of the Templar land holdings and other possessions were handed to the Hospitallers, a portion of which was strong-armed via an annual fee charged by Philip to offset the costs he incurred in persecuting the Knights Templar.

“On this terrible day, in my final hour, I shall let truth triumph and declare, before heaven and all the saints, that I have committed the greatest of all crimes...” shouted Molay, “But my crime is this: That I confessed to malicious charges made against an order that is innocent so that I could escape further torture. I shall not confirm a first lie with a second. I renounce life willingly. I have no use for days of sorrow earned only by lies.” These were the last words uttered by the Grand Master before branches were set ablaze around him. The men shouted their innocence and faith in God as they burned alive. In a matter of minutes, the entirety of the Knights Templar was reduced to ashes.

Chapter 10: Mysterious Religious Relics

One major outcome of the Crusades has been a sort of glorification of religious relics. Even such objects as soil from Biblical locations and the bones of Saints are highly regarded and mythicized. Even more bizarre was the fact that King Baldwin II sold what was claimed to be the head of John the Baptist to King Louis IX of France, who then constructed a shrine for it. Considered one of the most sought-after pieces is the “True Cross”. The relic is described to have been plated in gold and studded with gemstones; reportedly discovered by Empress Helena, the mother of Constantine I, in the year 326.

In an account from writer and historian Andrew Sinclair, “In AD 326, Helena went on a journey to ancient Israel and selected with Macarius the sites of Christ’s birth at Bethlehem and at Jerusalem, the adjoining places of his tomb burial and Crucifixion, where she happened to discover three ancient crosses in a cavern, one of which was called the true cross.” Bishop Macarius and Helena prayed for God’s help and placed a sickly woman onto each of the three crosses. Nothing happened as she lay on the first two, but when she was made to lie out on the third, she was healed. This is the method by which the two concluded which of the three crosses was the one on which Jesus was crucified. This was the True Cross.

When Helena returned with the True Cross, it was held in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher until 614 when Chosroes II of Persia captured Jerusalem and took the Cross. Over a decade later, the Emperor of Rome Heraclius overthrew Chosroes and claimed the relic. He first took it to Constantinople and then eventually back to its original location in Jerusalem. It is believed that from there, the Christians hid the Cross in 1009 CE and it remained hidden for almost a century until the next appearance in history during the First Crusade in 1099. The Cross didn’t change hands again until it was taken from the Christians by Saladin in 1187 after the Battle of Hattin. It was said that when Saladin and his forces took Jerusalem, he rode through the street on horseback dragging the Holy Relic behind his mount. “After The Horns of Hattin, Saladin was master of the Moslem world, and rode through the streets of Damascus with the captured True Cross tied to his horse’s tail and dragging in the dust.”

Richard I, despite his valiant efforts and determination during the Third Crusade, was unable to recapture the True Cross. After the relic was taken by Saladin, there hasn't been a reliable record of the large beam carried into the Battle of Hattin. Many have come forward with splinters of the Cross, but most were undoubtedly counterfeit. The True Cross was a symbol of the Christian's unwavering faith in their God and their cause. It was more than just an object, but an exalted piece of history and of the crucifixion story. Some would even say that the relic served as a reminder of the Crusaders entire purpose, which is why they carried it into battle that day.

According to the crucifixion story in the book of John, Jewish leaders overseeing the event didn't want the victims there by the next day. The Passover Sabbath was approaching and they asked Pilate to quicken their deaths by breaking their legs so they could then take them down. The soldiers came and broke the legs of the two men that were crucified with Jesus. When the soldiers got to him, they discovered that he was already dead so they didn't break his legs.

Because of this, the early Christian church in Jerusalem believed that Jesus was indeed who he claimed to be – The Messiah who was written about in the Old Testament. This fulfillment of the biblical prophecy has made the spear itself a sort of religious relic. The piercing of his flesh with the spear was considered proof of his death and later his resurrection. The Spear of Longinus was said to have been uncovered by Helena around the same time and place as the discovery of the Holy Nails. Later, it was reported to have been buried somewhere in Antioch as a way to prevent theft by the Saracens.

Nothing is known of the weapon until St. Antonius of Piacenza while describing his pilgrimage to the Holy Land of Jerusalem claims that he saw at Mount Sion “the crown of thorns with which Our Lord was crowned and the lance with which He was struck in the side”. This cannot necessarily be relied on, but the simple mention of the name Longinus – which is believed to be a later addition – was spelled out in Greek characters in the Syriac manuscript and appears over the soldier who opened Jesus' side during the crucifixion. Longinus, according to the manuscript, was converted and healed by a drop of Christ's blood that spurted from his wound. In 615, when Jerusalem was captured by the Persians, the spear and other religious relics fell into pagan hands. According to the “Chronicon Paschale”, the broken point of the lance was given to Nicetas who then took it to the church of St. Sophia in Constantinople.

As for the larger portion of the Holy Lance, it was proposed to have been seen in the year 670 by Arculpus. It was said to have been restored by Heraclius, but was then regarded at the church of the Holy Sepulchre. There is no known record of it after this time. Speculation is that it was moved to Constantinople along with the broken point and the crown of thorns. Various pilgrims attest to its presence there, particularly Russians. Though the relics bounced around through countless churches and institutions, their whereabouts had been surprisingly well documented. There are periods of time when the location of the spear was left only to speculation, but in 1492 it is documented to have fallen into the hands of the Turks under circumstances described in "History of the Popes". Sultan Bajazet was said to have sent it to Innocent VIII to gain his favour for his brother Zizim, who was a prisoner at the time.

Much speculation and sensationalism as to the true whereabouts surrounds the lance as well as other religious relics of medieval times. Wherever the true spear ended up, many historians and conspiracy theorists speculate that at some point, the Holy Lance would have ended up in the hands of the Knights Templar. After all, they were the most trusted Order of the time. Their involvement with banks and the safekeeping of objects such as this would lead most to believe that the knights were charged with stowing away the relic and creating a secret code to protect it and other objects of value such as the Holy Grail.

The Knights Templar are suspected of playing a major role in uncovering and guarding the Holy Grail. Rumors and supposed eyewitness accounts have placed the Order in key areas during the time of the Crusades searching for holy relics while they had occupation of the Temple Mount. Scholars have suggested that once the Holy Land was no longer under Christian control, many of the knights were forced into hiding to avoid persecution and took with them the sacred relics that they had been protecting. These rumors and speculation further serve to perpetuate the mystery of the Order, combined with the fact that the knights were adept at using coded and secrets to move and store items like they did for clients during the time of Templar banks. Countless books past and present tell of decoding messages and signs of the Knights Templar in the search for the sacred chalice.

The mystery of the Holy Grail lies not only in the search for its

whereabouts, but also as to what it actually is. Some believe that it is the cup which was used by Christ himself during the last supper. Others believe that it was not an object, but a sort of metaphor. When considering the Templar code, they gave little importance to material objects- even those said to have been touched by Christ. They considered worldly possessions as mere illusions to be dismissed. During the time of Church inquisition, non-traditional Christians had to practice their religion in secret and communicate by code.

In the time of the Order, non-traditional Christians were forced to hide their beliefs and communicate in secret code in order to avoid persecution by the Church. If you were to meet with someone whom you believed to also be Gnostic, you would proceed with the salutation "Beauseant". If they knew the code, you would then etch a cross on the ground with all four sides being even – a symbol of balance. Then they would answer with a confirmation of the Star of David and both parties knew they were safe to discuss matters freely. This use of secrecy and codes direct our attention to the possibility that the chalice could be a symbol of an idea and not actually the cup itself. Dating back almost to the 5th century, the spiritual Heart was often symbolized with a drinking vessel. Gnostics consistently referred to the Heart of Christ opening in everyone. The Sacred Heart of the World makes a plausible connection between the spiritual heart of Jesus and the drinking vessel, much like the Catholic Church symbolizes the blood of Christ with wine or grape juice during communion. It is simply a way to bring physical examples of Christ's love to a congregation. In using the symbol of the cup, the Holy Grail, Templars referred to a direct connection to the spiritual Heart of Jesus.

Elaine Pagel's Gnostic Gospels tells that the secret instructions given by Jesus to a chosen few became known as Gnosticism. Teachings such as these were promptly banned by the Church in the 5th century. But as we all know, you can get rid of the teacher but you can't get rid of the idea. Those that were privy to these secretive teachings knew the true essence of Jesus' love. They also knew all the biblical facts, such as that Jesus was an educated man who wrote and spoke both Greek and Aramaic. For a prophet who intended to promulgate his teachings, wouldn't it stand to reason that he must have written them down at some point? If this is true it may mean that the Holy Grail is in fact not a lowly material possession, but instead a document that was written by Jesus himself.

The construction of the Ark of the Covenant was commanded of Moses by God while the Jews were camped at Mount Sinai. The Ark was a small box 2 ½ cubits in length, 1 ½ cubits in height and 1 ½ cubits in width. It was crafted out of acacia wood and plated inside and out with pure gold. Four gold rings were fitted to the bottom and in those were placed two gold-plated acacia poles. These poles were used by the Kehath family of the tribe of Levi in order to carry the Ark atop their shoulders. A gold covering called a kapporet featuring a pair of gold Cherubs adorned the outside of the box. The two Cherubs were depicted facing one another with the wings of each wrapping around their golden bodies to touch the other in the space between the two. These were said to be the archangels Gabriel and Michael, who according to the Hebrews are the gatekeepers of Heaven.

The contents that were contained inside the Ark have been the subject of speculation throughout the ages, but it is generally accepted that the Ark contained the stone tablets broken by Moses and etched with the Ten Commandments as well as the second intact set. The Talmud claims that both Tablets were put together into one Ark; yet according to other accounts there were in fact two separate Arks containing one set each. The Ark was reported to have been constructed by the son of Bezalel, who was the son of Uri, who in turn was the son of Hur; the man responsible for constructing the Tabernacle which was the Temple used in the desert during the conquest of Israel. The Ark along and other artifacts used in worship were held in the Tabernacle.

As the Jews marched through the desert, the Ark accompanied them on their travels and wars with Midian and Emor. The Ark was carried along while they came into the land of Canaan and the Jordan River split miraculously for them to cross as well as when the walls of Jericho were leveled by them blowing horns and circling the city. After their conquest, the Jews set up the Tabernacle in Shiloh and remained there until after the battles between the Philistines and the Jews. After suffering from incredible defeat at the hands of the Philistines, the Jews took the Ark to Even-Ezer with the hope that its divinity would assist them in the next battle. Their plans were thwarted however when the Philistines took ownership of the Ark.

The Philistines took their prize to Ashdod, the capital in the south of Canaan and gave it a home in the Temple of the god Dagon. The following morning, the idol was found to have fallen face down. Another day passed and after replacing the statue back upright, it was found vandalized with only the bottom half remaining in the temple.

Shortly following these anomalies, the city of Ashdod was stricken with plague. The strangeness continued when after the Ark was relocated to the city of Gath and then from there to the city of Ekron. Wherever the Ark was housed, plague followed and decimated the city's inhabitants. After seven deadly months in the possession of the Philistines, they decided to return the cursed idol to the Israelites with a number of other fine gifts to serve as an apology and gain favor to avoid any further plagues.

The Ark was then taken to Beit Shemesh and according to legend, the oxen that pulled the cart carrying the Ark burst into gleeful song at the prospect of the artifact once again being in the possession of the Israelites. Other stories were a bit darker in nature. For example, some of the men in Beit Shemesh were reportedly severely punished for disrespectfully staring at the Ark and many were killed by plague afterward. Eventually, the Ark found a home in Jerusalem in the First Temple constructed by Solomon, son of King David and remained there to be accessed annually by the High Priest during Yom Kippur. After the temple was destroyed by the Babylonian empire, the whereabouts of the Ark became a mystery.

Sometime later, in the 1180s, a troupe of English knights came upon a treasure at the foot of Jebel Madhbah – the Arab name for Mount Seir, which is believed to be Mount Sinai. According to the chronicles of Numairi, these knights stumbled upon a curious sealed cave at the base of the mountain where they uncovered “treasures of pure gold, precious stones and a golden chest.” There was no direct reference that this chest was indeed the Ark of the Covenant; however the claim was that the treasure included religious relics once belonging to the Israelites. The chest was reported to have been made from gold panels featuring two winged creatures atop the lid which were reminiscent of statues from Numairi's native Egypt. Unfortunately there was no mention of the chest's dimensions, but according to biblical accounts the Ark was constructed a short time after the Israelites emancipation from generations of Egyptian rule. It is very plausible that the craftsmen may have drawn inspiration from other Egyptian architecture and art.

When the Arabs reclaimed Jerusalem in 1189 the Order was pushed back from the region, reportedly carrying with them the Ark of the Covenant amongst other treasures and relics. Property records from the 12th century list sacred objects that remained in the possession of the Order. Stories have circulated claiming that the Templars spent at

least a decade excavating underneath Temple Mount. In 1867, a team of Royal Engineers lead by Lieutenant Warren and Captain Charles Wilson unearthed a network of tunnels that extended vertically from Al Aqsa mosque for 25 meters before splitting apart under what is believed to have been the temple of King Solomon. We can confirm the involvement of the Knights Templar by the amount of artifacts left in the tunnels by Crusaders, which are now housed as part of a private collection.

Chapter 11: The Knights Templar and Freemasonry

The Knights Templar, more than any other group in history, have been shrouded in mystery, propaganda and sensationalism that originated during their reign of power and continued throughout their disbanding and for centuries afterward. The scene was set for speculation as the major religions battled and left behind revered relics. One myth that has surfaced throughout history was that “the Templars were created by an organization called the Priory of Sion to excavate in Jerusalem and find information about the bloodline of Christ”, according to historian John Walker. Other theorists claim that the Order was in possession of the Holy Grail or heretical secret. Speculation ran rampant after the disbanding of the Templars, some claiming that they later became Freemasons – a rumor that was perpetuated by the Freemasons themselves.

The connection between the Knights and Freemasons was promoted by early masonic groups of the 18th century. Most conspiracies have only come about since ‘Holy Blood, Holy Grail’ was published in 1980. It was then that a number of wildly exaggerated myths began circulating about the Templars. Most recently, ‘The Da Vinci Code’ captivated readers with Templar myth that was promoted in ‘Holy Blood, Holy Grail’. So similar were the ideas that the authors attempted to sue Dan Brown. The legend of the Knights Templar as some sort of guardians of ancient wisdom has been more compelling to the public of modern times than their factual history as bankers and political figures. The more sensational the tale becomes, the deeper we have to dig to reach the truth.

It was said that after the disbandment of the Order, they went off the grid and developed a deep disdain for organized monotheistic religions and the Church in particular. Some believe that the Templars that escaped persecution transmuted into the organization which today are known as the Freemasons. Whether or not this is the truth, there are still many parallels between the Masons and the Templars. Even those in high positions of Masonry are given titles that are seemingly inspired by the Knights Templar such as the Guardian of the Temple.

During Innocent II’s time as Pope, he gave the Templars the freedom

to build and govern their own churches which was unheard of in a time of the Church's absolute power. In the process of designing their own church, the Templars developed a new architectural style that later came to be known as "Gothic." In Graham Hancock's 'The Sign and the Seal', it is said that Gothic architecture was popularized in 1134 during the construction of the northern tower at Chartres Cathedral. The person heading this project was the Templar's spiritual leader, St. Bernard. He felt that it was of utmost importance to symbolize a Kabbalistic approach and the Templar's esotericism. Hancock wrote that the patron of the Templars placed emphasis on using sacred geometry as well.

Their expertise in Gothic architecture and masonry and experience in constructing cathedrals and castles gave them the chance to come together with the Freemasons. Published works of reference by Masons often refer to the symbolism of their merge with the Knights Templar. One Turkish Mason wrote: "The Grand Master's abacus [staff of office] is evidence for the connection between the Templars and Freemasons. This staff is a symbol representing Aaron's rod [mentioned in the Bible-a walking stick that sprouted leaves]. Its head is in the form of a temple, and along the length of its body is carved measurements. This staff is a symbol of masonry." Throughout the middle ages, Freemasons and Templars often conducted business side by side and it is probably safe to assume that they did draw influence from one another.

In absorbing the remaining members of the Knights Templar, Masons began to observe a shift from operational Masonry to speculative. In Paris, lodges were built for those who were not involved in the clergy and shared quarter with the Templars. The Pope's 1312 decision to abolish the Templar's order also included the end of Masonic privilege to free passage. Upon this, the Masons of France relocated to Germany which then saw an influx of Gothic architecture and the induction of even more Templars who were also fleeing from France. A handwritten documentation dated from 1760 makes no secret of the two organization's mystical knowledge. It explains how Templar secrets were passed down to modern Freemasonry. In a sense, the Templars never actually ceased to exist. Instead, their ideals and knowledge merged with and shaped the Freemasons.

Whether this "divine knowledge" was related in some way to occult mysticism or whether it was simply the skill of architecture, engineering and business has been and will continue to be the subject

of much speculation and superstition. The factual accounts of their contributions to architecture are just as awe-inspiring. The Masons had been known for making use of gematria, ancient Hebrew ciphers that substitute numbers for letters. With this they were able to, in a sense, spell out obscure phrases within the dimensions of a building. Glaziers and sculptors working closely with the Masons received instructions from high clergy to include concealed messages about scripture, history and human nature in the different pieces they created. In an example of this hidden language, there appears a carving and inscription on the northern side of the Chartres Cathedral. The image is that of a large box being transported in an ox cart. Above the carving, the phrase “HIC AMICITUR ARCHA CEDERIS” can be seen. This inscription when taken into account in combination with the location of surrounding sculptures outside the cathedral have perplexed scholars for quite some time. Most believe that this was some sort of clue pointing toward the whereabouts of the lost Ark of the Covenant.

The Scottish rite of Freemasonry of the 14th century was the oldest Masonic lodge to provide inclusion to the Templars who sought refuge in Scotland and was referred to by Baron Karl von Hund as the restoration of the Knights Templar. The titles of high ranking members, ideals, rituals and rules are so similar that it is difficult to discern where one ended and the other began. According to von Hund, eight prominent Templars fled to Scotland via Ireland in order to escape persecution at home.

Another similar organization were the Rosicrucians, which were founded as a sister organization to Freemasonry by the Templars. Two of the first authentic Rosicrucian writings, “Fama Fraternitatis” and “Confessio Rosae Crucis” came to light during 1614 and 1615 in Germany. These two accounts are said to contain crucial knowledge related to the Order. The Rosicrucians were a secretive group who followed the combined teachings of Gnosticism, Egyptian Hermeticism and teachings from the Kabbalah.

There are numerous examples of different groups throughout the middle ages who derived a portion or all of their ideals, teachings and rituals from the Knights Templar. The Order was never truly dissolved, but merely dispersed throughout Europe into smaller sects such as the Scottish rite and the Rosicrucians.

Conclusion

For each historical account regarding the Templars, there are ten stories of their esotericism and reports of involvement with the occult. Whether or not the Templars or modern Freemasons are guarding some incredible secret, the fact remains that rumors fly wild whenever the subject of these secretive groups is brought up. Looking at the development of the Templars is helpful in understanding where they came from and how their views and motivations shifted throughout their history. They started from what seemed to have been noble beginnings and took vows of poverty – an early symbol of the Knights Templar depicted two knights riding the same horse as a reference of the group's humility. The catch was that as individuals, the knights did take a vow to renounce worldly distractions such as material wealth. However as a combined group, the Templars had amassed a considerable fortune in just a short time, starting from charitable donations.

The group grew from only nine members to include skilled architects, clergymen, bankers, landholders, scholars and craftsmen. The Templars moved into power as they started loaning money to European countries and were granted the power to move freely throughout countries becoming somewhat of a private state unto themselves. This wealth and power unfortunately brought negative attention onto the group. They rose up the ranks quickly and were disbanded just as fast. All sorts of heinous charges were brought against them and they were tortured until they confessed. Leaders of the Order were executed and others who escaped persecution fled into neighboring countries. There, they reorganized and started their work under different names. The only exception is that now, if it ever was about religion, it isn't anymore. Whether the group was simply operating under the guise of righteousness or whether they lost faith after the pope refused to come to their aid we may never know for sure.

By some accounts, the Templars may have been involved in the occult before the trial and torture that led to their coerced and then recanted confessions. Some say they became interested in alternative sources of power after they were disbanded and had merged with the Masons. It has been reported that the Masons derived many of their rules and symbols from the Templars but it is unknown how much more information was exchanged and from which source. Despite historical

accounts, it is difficult to regard their great work in the field of finance, math and architecture and not wonder if they possess knowledge that we are not privy to.

In the year 1717, members of the Freemasons called “accepted Masons” made the decision to create a separate organization for themselves. This was proposed as being a brotherhood that provided freedom of thought and tolerance in the midst of such an oppressive political and religious environment. It drew ideals from those groups that came before it such as the Rosicrucians. Members practiced a philosophy that enlightenment was to be found in free thought. They upheld these ideas that originated in the 17th century.

In conclusion, I thank you and hope you have enjoyed the book. I also hope that in reading this, you will now be able to think openly and objectively about the facts as well as imaginatively about the possibilities that could have been left out of the record books. After all, the knights were secretive for a reason.

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